You Asked

Did Bible commentators Philip Doddridge and John Gill espouse a form of ‘pre-tribulation rapture’ eschatology, and did it have any resemblance to current trends in ‘Dispensationalism’?

Gemini Thinking

The question of whether 18th-century commentators like **Philip Doddridge** and **John Gill** taught a "pre-tribulation rapture" is a subject of significant debate among church historians. While they did not hold to "Dispensationalism" as it is known today (which was systematized by John Nelson Darby in the 1830s), they did express views on the timing of Christ's return that some scholars argue served as precursors to later rapture theology.

Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)

Doddridge was a prominent Nonconformist and the author of the widely read *The Family Expositor*. His views are often categorized as **Post-Sessionalism** or a unique form of **Historic Premillennialism**.

- **The Rapture Concept:** In his commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Doddridge described the believers being "caught up" to meet the Lord in the air. However, he generally viewed this as a final event coinciding with the general resurrection and judgment.
- **Resemblance to Dispensationalism:** Minimal. Doddridge did not emphasize a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church, nor did he clearly articulate a "two-stage" coming of Christ separated by a seven-year tribulation. For Doddridge, the "meeting in the air" was the triumphant entry of the saints into the eternal state.

John Gill (1697–1771)

John Gill, a highly influential Particular Baptist, provides a more complex case. Many modern scholars points to Gill as one of the earliest writers to suggest a functional separation between Christ’s coming *for* his saints and his coming *with* them.

Key Eschatological Points:

- **The "Air" as a Dwelling Place:** Gill suggested that when believers are caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4), they might remain there for a period while the earth is purified by fire.

- **The Conflagration:** Gill believed the earth would be burned and renovated. During this "conflagration," the saints would be safely "in the air" with Christ.
- **The Resurrection Order:** He held to a literal first resurrection of the righteous, followed by a thousand-year reign on the new earth, followed by the resurrection of the wicked.

Comparison to Modern Dispensationalism

While Gill's "separation" of the saints from the earth bears a structural resemblance to the Rapture, the underlying systems are quite different:

Feature	John Gill (Historic Premillennialist)	Modern Dispensationalism
The Tribulation	Generally viewed the "Tribulation" as the ongoing trials of the Church throughout history.	Views the "Great Tribulation" as a future 7-year period.
Israel vs. Church	Maintained a more unified "Covenant" view, though he believed in the future national conversion of the Jews.	Maintains a strict theological distinction between Israel and the Church.
Timing	The "catching up" happens at the very end of the age, immediately preceding the Millennium.	The Rapture happens *before* the 7-year Tribulation.

Summary of Influence

It is more accurate to say that Doddridge and Gill were **Premillennialists** who began to speculate on the mechanics of how the saints would be preserved during the transition from this age to the next.

They did not "espouse" a pre-tribulation rapture in the sense of a secret removal of the church to escape the Antichrist's 7-year reign. Instead, they provided the "theological scaffolding"—specifically the idea of a literal, physical meeting in the air prior to a reign on earth—that later Dispensationalists would build upon and reorganize into the current "Left Behind" style eschatology.

Would you like me to look into the specific scripture passages John Gill used to distinguish between the "coming" and the "appearance" of Christ?